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SURVEYING THE MIDDLE EAST

The *Middle East Contemporary Survey* (*MECS*), now in its second decade, is a collective work compiled and published on an annual basis. As each calendar year draws to a close, members of the Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, as well as other contributors, sift through a wide variety of published sources concerning the events of the past year. They then make judgments of selection and interpretation. Writing is finished by late spring; the following year, a 700-page volume appears, incorporating a regional overview of the Middle East, chapters on Great Power involvement, Arab-Israeli relations, regional conflicts, inter-Arab and inter-Muslim affairs, economic trends, Palestinian affairs, and analytical surveys of political and social developments in 18 Middle Eastern states.

MECS belongs to the genre of the survey or record of contemporary affairs. Like other such surveys, *MECS* aspires to provide an account of current events that is comprehensive, systematic, accurate and timely. And while the particular structure and content of *MECS* are original, the series continues a long tradition of survey writing on the contemporary Middle East. The continuity or even the existence of this tradition has not been widely recognized, probably because survey writing on the contemporary Middle East has long inhabited a grey area on the borders of journalism, Orientalism, history, and political science.

Survey writing, belonging to none of these disciplines yet drawing upon them all, is the sole vocation of no one. Yet it has often figured in careers of great accomplishment, and has played a role in the development of many leading academic institutions devoted to the study of the Middle East. It has never had the international character of that parallel work of collective scholarship devoted to the past, the *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Yet many nations have individually mobilized the resources to support survey writing on the contemporary Middle East. Taken together, these separate endeavors constitute

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an almost continuous contemporary survey of the Middle East since the start of this century — a monumental work of collective scholarship, written by scholars of many nationalities in several languages.

There can be no history (or critique) of the modern Western study of the Middle East without an appreciation of survey writing. It has always been one of the most important points of interaction between scholarship and society, contributing systematically to the ways different publics have understood the living Middle East. And while the history of Western scholarship on the Middle East has ceased to be read by many as a heroic saga, survey writing has been one of its nobler chapters. It has usually been marked by a conscientious striving for analytic fairness and a scrupulous presentation of evidence in the best documentary tradition. The following outline of that still-unwritten chapter is intended not only to place *MECS* in context, but to mark the place of survey writing in the formation of the field now known as Middle Eastern studies.

The application of critical method to the Islamic past began in the West during the nineteenth century; its application to the Islamic present began at the start of the twentieth, with the first production of critical surveys of contemporary affairs. The interpretation of the present had long been the province of diplomats, colonial administrators, soldiers, travelers, traders, and missionaries, who boasted the credential of extended residence in the Middle East. Contemporary affairs were the business of men of affairs, whose analyses often served political, commercial, or clerical interests. The 'news from Turkey' had no proper place in the universities of Europe, where Orientalists concerned themselves almost exclusively with the classical languages and literatures of Arabic and Persian, and the theology and early history of Islam. The scholarly conventions of nineteenth-century Orientalism, fixed as they were upon the study of Oriental languages and classical periods of Oriental history, discouraged inquiry into contemporary affairs. So long as such inquiry remained outside formal disciplines, the interpretation of contemporary Islam in the West lacked the authority claimed by Western scholars for their interpretations of historical Islam.

But as the nineteenth century closed, a growing number of academic Orientalists were distracted by the contemporary march of events in Muslim lands. They were drawn to contemporary affairs by the rise of an indigenous Middle Eastern press — a press that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and thrived following constitutional revolutions in Turkey and Persia in the first decade of the new century. The study of contemporary affairs no

longer required continuous residence in the Middle East, but could be done in a disciplined manner through the systematic reading of newspapers in Turkish, Persian, and Arabic. Armed with evidence provided by the press, Orientalists could speak with authority on contemporary affairs without leaving the solitude of their studies in the universities and other academic establishments of Europe. The pioneers in this endeavor were Arminius Vambéry, who wrote from Budapest on Turkish and Ottoman affairs; Martin Hartmann, who assessed the emergence of Arab nationalism from Berlin; and Edward Granville Browne, who wrote a seminal book in Cambridge on the Persian Constitutional Revolution. All three were assiduous readers and collectors of Middle Eastern newspapers that found their way to Europe. As the Middle Eastern press grew in scope and quality, more Orientalists developed a secondary interest in contemporary affairs and the confidence to interpret them from cultural and historical perspectives that other interpreters lacked.

Again and again, the pattern was repeated across Europe. Once enough scholars shared an interest in contemporary events, they organized themselves for the acquisition of the press, its systematic translation and analysis, and finally the production of periodic surveys of contemporary affairs. Such projects were necessarily the work of highly organized research teams, commanding resources on a scale most readily achieved in countries that had political, economic, or imperial interests in the Middle East. Such interests created the ideal conditions for collective scholarship and projects of ambitious dimensions that depended upon the pooling of resources and talents.

The initial breakthrough occurred in Paris in 1906, with the first publication of the *Revue du Monde musulman*. Its founding editor, the dynamic Alfred Le Chatelier, was a veteran of the Algerian *Bureaux Arabes*, who in 1902 emerged from a series of political interventions as the incumbent of a new chair of 'Muslim sociology and sociography' at the Collège de France.[1] The preoccupation of France with pan-Islamic 'intrigue' before the war had led to the establishment of a Service des Affaires Musulmanes in the Colonial Ministry, a unit for review of the Muslim press, and an inter-ministerial commission for Muslim affairs. These bureaucratic structures reflected the certain conviction that ideas generated in one corner of the Muslim world affected French interests in another. Le Chatelier played upon this conviction to

1 Edmund Burke, III, 'La Mission scientifique au Maroc: Science sociale et politique dans l'âge de l'impérialisme,' *Bulletin économique et social du Maroc* 138–139 (1979): 37–56.

build official support for a journal that would provide comprehensive coverage of trends of opinion throughout the Muslim world.

In 64 issues published between 1906 and 1926, the *Revue du Monde musulman* provided readers with a sensitive, informed, and fundamentally sympathetic account of the crisis then confronting Islam. Le Chatelier pledged that the journal would steer clear of politics; it would deal objectively with 'the history and present state of the social organization of the Muslim world,' 'the contemporary movement of deeds and ideas,' and future 'tendencies and orientation.'[2] The *Revue du Monde musulman* carried regular articles, but its most innovative features were the notes and documents, a survey of the Muslim press, and a section entitled 'around the Muslim world.' These features, based overwhelmingly on the Muslim press, constituted the stable core of the review.

Through their reading of newspapers, the contributors to the *Revue du Monde musulman* succeeded in registering remote tremors of Muslim opinion, and the review quickly acquired a singular voice of authority.[3] At the heart of Le Chatelier's small team was Lucien Bouvat, a master of Oriental languages who specialized in Turkish; he was so painfully timid and self-effacing that he could not teach. But he was industrious, a trait as essential to the success of the project as Le Chatelier's personal dynamism. Still more promising scholars were not above performing the routine work of the review: Louis Massignon wrote nearly 200 pages of the review's Arabic press summary immediately before and after the First World War.

In its own time, the *Revue du Monde musulman* represented a great stride forward in the technique of gathering, organizing, and disseminating knowledge about current affairs. In the rational division of labor established for the production of the review, a well-connected leader-scholar mobilized the financial resources and political support essential to the project. Once these were secured, a research institute was founded to house the project, and that institute employed a diversified research team to handle the documentary materials in the relevant languages. Affiliation with respected academic auspices enhanced the authority of the finished product. The resulting work obviously filled a real need, for the press run of the *Revue du Monde musulman* reached 1,200 during its first year, a figure as impressive now as it was then.

2 A. Le Chatelier, 'A un maître d'école de Médinet el-Fayoum,' *Revue du Monde musulman* 1/1 (November 1906): 1–5.

3 The *Revue du Monde musulman* is set in its contemporary context by Edmund Burke, III, 'The First Crisis of Orientalism, 1890–1914,' in Jean-Claude Vatin (ed.), *Connaissances du Maghreb: Sciences sociales et colonisation*, Paris 1984, pp. 220–222.

A preoccupation with pan-Islam ran through the pages of Le Chatelier's journal. The *Revue du Monde musulman* appeared at a time of great French apprehension lest the contagion of militant Islam spread to French North Africa via the network of religious orders and the pilgrimage. Le Chatelier was not an alarmist, and he discounted pan-Islam as a force for political disruption. But he did believe in what he called 'social pan-Islam,' and the *Revue du Monde musulman* consequently devoted a great many pages to the trek of ideas and opinions across the Muslim world. It did this so effectively that the journal developed a substantial readership among Muslim intellectuals who wished to follow currents of opinion elsewhere in the Muslim world.

Yet for all its success, the *Revue du Monde musulman* left much to be desired. The journal did not present a systematic narrative of change, but rather a series of glimpses into the elusive spirit of contemporary Islam. From an editorial point of view, the journal's arrangement often bordered on the chaotic. The *Revue du Monde musulman* dealt principally with intellectual expression on social questions, and its selection and presentation of this material often seemed capricious. Coverage of the press was uneven and highly erratic. Names of persons and places were transliterated in every imaginable way, adding to the confusion. The *Revue du Monde musulman* often had the character of a grab bag; its contents are retrievable only because the editors published a comprehensive index as the journal's last act. (Massignon solemnly reported that the card manuscript of the index 'weighs 17.930 kilograms, and measures 1.64 meters long in a compacted and compressed state.'[4])

The review appeared regularly for two decades, but began to falter after 1919, when Massignon became director. The war had damaged the scholarly credibility of the review, for it had been briefly enlisted as an instrument of French propaganda among Muslims. One wartime issue, entitled 'Le Salut au Drapeau,' was filled with African Muslim professions of allegiance to France. In an editorial written in 1919, Massignon promised that the journal would return to 'precise, methodic, and independent documentation,' presented in a 'manageable' fashion; the journal would be 'strictly objective, benevolent, courteous, and impartial.'[5] But it was too late to redeem the journal's tarnished reputation, and the presentation became no more manageable than before. On a deeper level, a fundamental assumption of the review's approach — that Muslim

4 *Revue du Monde musulman* 65–66 (3d and 4th trimesters 1926): vi (footnote).

5 'Ce que doit être une documentation périodique sur les problèmes politiques et sociaux du Monde musulman,' *Revue du Monde musulman* 36 (1918–19): 1–9.

lands had the coherence of a world unto itself, that the events in one part of that world were bound to affect another — had been undermined by the failure of pan-Islam during the war. By the war's end, the idea of Islam as the point of departure for all interpretative discourse on the region had lost much of its persuasive power. It had yielded to the growing conviction that there was no Muslim 'world' but a vast expanse in the Middle East and North Africa inhabited by peoples of different nationalities, each charting its separate course. Massignon saw the new national movements as so many departures from the bonds of spiritual solidarity and the universalism of Islam;[6] as the Muslim world drew away from its spiritual vocation, so Massignon drew away from the documentation of its changing political moods. In 1927, Massignon — newly ensconced in Le Chatelier's chair — refashioned the review into a journal of articles, the *Revue des études islamiques*, which dropped the press summaries and gradually distanced itself from the interpretation of contemporary affairs.[7]

But the appearance of a much more thorough publication perhaps made Massignon's decision to close the *Revue du Monde musulman* inescapable. In May 1921, the newly established Istituto per l'Oriente in Rome published the first issue of a monthly journal, *Oriente Moderno*. The editors explained that the war had created new opportunities for Italy in the Middle East, yet the Italian public remained ill-informed about the region's recent past and present. Italian public opinion needed 'disinterested' information drawn from genuine sources on the various problems of the Middle East. The journal would be concerned with political, administrative, and military events as they happened; the trends and ideas behind them; and the social, economic, and cultural circumstances in which they were formed. All these would be assessed on the basis of indigenous press sources, supplemented by explanatory notes. *Oriente Moderno* planned to shun 'colonial questions' — matters of Italian policy best left to policy journals. '*Oriente Moderno* does not intend to propose particular solutions to the different problems raised in political debates, but to furnish such elements and such

6 For Massignon's ambivalence toward Arab nationalism, see Giuseppe Contu, 'Il mondo arabo contemporaneo nell'opera di Louis Massignon,' in Carmela Baffioni (ed.), *Atti del Convegno sul centenario della nascita di Louis Massignon*, Napoli 1985, pp. 71–82.

7 In 1924, Massignon published the first edition of the *Annuaire du Monde musulman*; subsequent editions appeared in 1926, 1929, and 1955. Massignon wrote that the *Annuaire* was inspired by the *Handbooks* produced by the British of the Cairo Arab Bureau during the war. But Massignon's *Annuaire* was a yearbook of facts and figures, not an annual survey of events, and it enjoyed neither the reputation nor the longevity of the *Revue du Monde musulman*.

information as would permit makers of policy and men of affairs to know the truth about the Orient.'[8]

Oriente Moderno won immediate international recognition as the preeminent source for information on the emergent national movements of the contemporary Middle East. Extensive press coverage, systematic presentation, and rigorous editorial control combined to set new standards for the documentation of contemporary affairs. *Oriente Moderno* applied the uncompromising Orientalist respect for texts to the daily Arabic, Turkish, and Persian press, for it was under the 'scientific direction' of an exacting master: Carlo Alfonso Nallino, professor of Muslim history and institutions at the University of Rome and Italy's preeminent Orientalist. Nallino had been schooled in the traditional disciplines of history and philology, but during the previous decade had placed his knowledge of Muslim institutions at the service of his government, issuing advice on the reform of Muslim education in Libya and the question of the Caliphate. Nallino soon acquired a standing in Rome as an authority on contemporary Muslim affairs, and drew upon his prestige to win the support of leading parliamentarians for the creation of the Istituto per l'Oriente.

Oriente Moderno carried documents, chronologies, articles, book reviews, and a section of scholarly news, but its unique standing derived from the 'various notices' culled from the press. The staff of the institute selected items from many newspapers in Middle Eastern and European languages, and meticulously translated and summarized their contents according to precise rules established by Nallino and his closest associate, Ettore Rossi, who followed Turkish affairs for the journal. Nallino did not visit the institute often, but all material was brought to him at his home, and his critical eye assured the highest standards of selection, translation, and transliteration. *Oriente Moderno* interpreted events through selection, and its attributions of significance were not made without careful consideration. The Middle East that emerged from its pages teemed with nationalist activity, mostly against Britain and France: *Oriente Moderno* constituted the only systematic and documented account of indigenous protest against the policies of the powers, and won a very select and influential readership. While its circulation never exceeded 800, many subscribers relied upon it heavily for their information on Arab opinion, including such ostensibly well-informed quarters as the British Foreign Office.

8 'Il nostro programma,' *Oriente Moderno*, o.s., 1 (1921): 1–2.

The fact that *Oriente Moderno* gained an international reputation for accuracy and objectivity was a remarkable achievement, given the fact that it was compiled and published during the Fascist era. Its meticulous documentation of Arab nationalist activity in Syria, Palestine, and Iraq was not without political advantage to Italy, and Italian representatives often cited the journal in challenging British and French reports to the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations in Geneva. The Istituto per l'Oriente also received modest subventions from the Foreign and Colonial Ministries, and served as an informal press service by providing advance copies of its press summaries to the government.[9] But Nallino proved himself quite incapable of propagandizing, because he refused all simplification. His Middle East, and that of *Oriente Moderno*, was a vast, complex, and ever-changing canvass.[10] Politically, Nallino was a liberal, and he did not spare Italian readers of *Oriente Moderno* the Arab criticism leveled against Italy over General Graziani's ruthless crushing of Muslim resistance in Cyrenaica in 1930 — notices which the censorship did not touch, lest their absence damage the journal's international reputation for comprehensiveness.[11] Nallino's immense prestige assured the inviolability of *Oriente Moderno*; his death in 1938 did not bode well for the journal's continued independence.

There were many reasons why *Oriente Moderno* should have folded after the Second World War. Not only was the leader-scholar gone, but Italy had been defeated and deprived of all imperial possessions. But the end of the Italian empire actually worked to the advantage of the Istituto per l'Oriente, for its work suited Italy's campaign to win the friendship of the new states of the Middle East, and the official subsidies continued to flow. More to the point, Nallino's collaborators were worshipful disciples who could not bear to abandon the project launched by 'the Founder.' What one collaborator described as the 'heroic era' had passed, but *Oriente Moderno* geared up again under Rossi's directorship, and reappeared in its original format. The volumes dealing with the post-war world of independent Middle Eastern states were rarely as thick as the pre-war volumes, and as other publications appeared, fewer

9 Virginia Vacca, 'Nallino e l'Istituto per l'Oriente,' *Levante* (Rome) 20/1 (March 1973): 60–66.

10 The judgment of G. Levi Della Vida, 'Carlo Alfonso Nallino,' *Oriente Moderno*, o.s., 18 (1938): 475.

11 Vincenzo Strika, 'C.A. Nallino e l'impres libica,' *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* (Venice) 2 (1984): 9–20, which cited the relevant passages from *Oriente Moderno*. On Nallino's emergence as an authority on contemporary affairs, see Gianni Albergoni, 'Variations italiennes sur un thème français: La Sanûsîya,' in Jean-Claude Vatin (ed.), *Connaissances du Maghreb*, pp. 128–131.

foreigners with an interest in contemporary Middle Eastern affairs were prepared to read about them in Italian. Yet only in 1979 did financial troubles brought on by rampant inflation compel the Istituto per l'Oriente to abandon its venerated format. *Oriente Moderno* has since become a conventional academic journal composed of disparate articles.[12]

Readers who found the presentation of Middle Eastern events in *Oriente Moderno* too austere for their tastes could turn to the *Survey of International Affairs* of the Royal Institute of International Affairs — Chatham House — in London. Edited and largely written by Arnold Toynbee, the *Survey* was conceived as an annual narrative of world events. The volumes were to be 'confined to facts,' wrote the secretary of the Institute in his preface to the first volume: 'The primary object of these publications is to enable speakers and writers to gather in the time available for their task the factual material, carefully checked, upon which to base the advice which they offer to the public.'[13] The first volumes of the *Survey* did not include the Middle East, but in 1927 Toynbee published a large tome under the title *The Islamic World since the Peace Settlement*, and the Middle East subsequently figured in most of the annual volumes of the *Survey*.

While Toynbee was schooled in classical history, he had dealt with the contemporary Middle East in an earlier study of the Turkish-Greek conflict, and so regarded himself as particularly qualified to provide competent coverage of the region. He had the writing discipline of a journalist, an imaginative grasp of history, and an intuitive sense of how to season the interpretation of contemporary events for the British palate. The prestigious auspices of the *Survey*, its interpretative flourish, and Toynbee's own dynamism assured that its treatment of Middle Eastern affairs would gain a much more influential readership than any comparable publication before or since.

But the *Survey* covered the world, and the Middle East could not command the undivided attention of Toynbee or his collaborators. It was crisis-driven, and the Middle East warranted attention only when it threatened trouble. The region did not receive equal coverage in every volume, for in certain years it had to compete with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia or the Spanish Civil War.[14] The

12 A brief personal history of *Oriente Moderno*'s production is provided by Francesco Gabrieli, 'I vecchi tempi dell'Istituto per l'Oriente,' *Oriente Moderno*, n.s., 3 (1984): 51–55.

13 Preface to Arnold J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1920–23* (1925): vi.

14 Coverage of the Middle East may be found in the *Survey* for 1925, 1928, 1930, 1934, 1936, 1937, and 1938; in the volumes by George Kirk entitled *The Middle East in the War 1939–1946* and *The Middle East 1945–1950*; and in all subsequent volumes of the *Survey* beginning in 1951.

Survey, in the words of Elie Kedourie, 'was chained to the chariot of current affairs, endeavouring breathlessly to keep up with them. But this was a vain endeavour since history cannot be written from newspaper cuttings. The attempt to do so only meant that partiality to fashionable political rhetoric was not checked, but rather reinforced by the uncritical assertions of restless "newsmen" avidly questing for "stories."'[15] The reliance on 'newsmen' was particularly acute because the *Survey* was not based on indigenous press sources. It relied heavily upon Western press reports and (until the mid-1930s) upon *Oriente Moderno*, which Toynbee acknowledged as 'by far the best existing periodical dealing with current Islamic affairs which is published in either Europe or America in any Western language.'[16]

In covering the Middle East, the *Survey* confined its purview to the international affairs of the region. Toynbee did not seek to cover Egypt or Arabia or Turkey per se, but emphasized their relations with the Great Powers and the outside world (although he included the process of internal Westernization in his scope). In particular, his emphases were skewed toward the relationship of the Middle East with Britain; the Middle East figured in the *Survey* principally as a problem of British policy. The *Survey* paid exhaustive attention to relations and treaties between Middle Eastern states and the Great Powers, and the border disputes between Middle Eastern states themselves, but spoke with very little authority on the nature of the newly emerging regimes of the region.

These lacunae arose from the ambitiously comprehensive scope of the *Survey*. But Albert Hourani struck upon a more substantial defect of the *Survey*, in a review of the *Survey* volume by George Kirk on the Middle East during the Second World War. The *Survey*'s coverage of the Middle East had always been 'marked by respect for the Muslim world as an entity with its own standards and forms of development, and by sensitiveness to all the implications, in time and eternity, of the relations between Islam and Christendom.' But a tendency to moralize clouded the *Survey*'s presentation of contemporary events:

> What makes me uneasy is the element of moral judgement which has entered so prominently into the *Survey* since the nineteen-thirties. In this volume there is perhaps too much of it. The Zionist leaders are guilty of 'intrigue, deceit, flattery, and corruption'; the Iraqi officers were

15 Elie Kedourie, 'The Chatham House Version,' in his *The Chatham House Version and other Middle-Eastern Studies*, London 1970, p. 382.

16 Arnold J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1925*, vol. 1: *The Islamic World since the Peace Settlement* (1927): vii.

> filled with 'a desire to hurt and avenge'; Rashid Ali and his group were victims of 'ignorance and egoism', and so on; and the author's reproaches follow the prejudice and partiality of other writers into the remotest footnotes. With many of Mr Kirk's judgements I agree; but they are so numerous and strongly expressed as to bring questions into the mind of even the most sympathetic reader. Is it possible to write contemporary history *sub specie aeternitatis*? Will not the historian who tries to do so inevitably give to his own preconceptions and feelings the form of eternal truth? A foreigner reading this book might well be bewildered by the contrast between its studiously objective, detached, and impersonal manner and the intensely subjective feelings and convictions it expresses. He might feel that the claim to pass judgement upon the actors in the historical drama was itself a product of the assumption, born of two centuries of power, that Britain was somehow outside history; and he would notice too that the author is more cautious about ascribing motives to the British Government than to others, and that not a few of his judgements are relative, movements being seen not in themselves but in their relation with Great Britain.[17]

In his response to this criticism of the *Survey*'s moralizing, Toynbee argued that there was an 'inescapable necessity of making moral judgements,' particularly on those contemporary issues that might constitute matters of life or death for author and reader alike. There was also 'an inescapable moral obligation to judge as justly as human nature can,' and to do so in 'parliamentary language.'[18] As the years passed, it was Britain that bore the brunt of his moral judgement, especially for its policy in the Middle East. The Middle Eastern sections of the *Survey* revolved around the confrontation of Middle Eastern nationalism and Western imperialism, portrayed as a moral rather than political contest.

When that contest had ended, the *Survey* became unmanageable. The post-war multiplicity of loyalties and states, in the Middle East and elsewhere, made the continuation of the *Survey* along previous lines an impossible task. When 'international relations' meant the relationship of a small number of European powers to one another and the rest of the world, they could be covered from a few accessible sources in one annual volume. But in the 1950s and 1960s, the *Survey* was overwhelmed by the emergence of dozens of new states and a flood of material generated by them and about them. The discussion of the Middle East in the post-war volumes was freed from Toynbeean strictures once the editorship passed to other hands. But the region received less attention in the diminished volumes of the post-war years. By the time the *Survey* wound down

17 *International Affairs* 24 (1953): 204–205.

18 Arnold J. Toynbee, 'The Writing of Contemporary History for Chatham House,' *International Affairs* 29 (1953): 138–139.

— a victim, like *Oriente Moderno*, of the diminished standing in the world of the host country, and a drying up of resources — it had long ceased to command the attention of students of the Middle East. The last volume covered 1963.

The collective scholarship that flourished in Paris, Rome, and London during the first decades of the century provided a striking contrast to the failed efforts to launch a contemporary survey in Berlin. There a small group of Orientalists led by Martin Hartmann and Georg Kampffmeyer had drawn encouragement from the development of the 'sociology of Islam' in Paris. Hartmann wrote his own annual surveys of developments in the Islamic world for the years 1907 and 1908, based on extensive reading of the Arabic and Turkish press and the *Revue du Monde musulman*. In 1912, he and a group of like-minded Orientalists established the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Islamkunde, a scholarly society devoted to the study of contemporary Islam. Among its declared purposes were editing of a journal, the building of a press collection, and promoting studies on the contemporary Muslim world. But these efforts never enjoyed the sanction of the most prestigious institutions of German academe, where contemporary affairs were regarded as unwelcome arrivals. Hartmann and Kampffmeyer were not even members of those institutions; they taught not in the university but in the Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen, a state-supported language school.[19]

In the early 1930s, Kampffmeyer launched a new plan for the preparation of periodic, detailed chronologies on the different countries of the Middle East. These pieces, based upon thorough studies of the press, included Gotthard Jäschke's chronologies on Turkey, Walter Björkman's on Egypt, and Edgar Pröbster's on North Africa; they appeared in the journals of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Islamkunde and the Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen. Kampffmeyer hoped to create a new publication to incorporate such chronologies, supported by a new institute and staffed by an academic research team that would share the task of analyzing the documentary material. He clearly planned to model this new institute on the Istituto per l'Oriente in Rome, and proposed to transform the journal of the Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen into an annual survey of Middle Eastern developments in the fields of international and domestic politics, legislation, culture, and economics.

19 For the context of this effort, see Martin Kramer, 'Arabistik and Arabism: The Passions of Martin Hartmann,' *Middle Eastern Studies* 25/3 (July 1989): 283–300. The history of German scholarship on the contemporary Middle East is outlined by Ulrich Haarmann, 'Die islamische Moderne bei den deutschen Orientalisten,' in Friedrich H. Kochwasser and Hans R. Roemer (eds.), *Araber und Deutsche*, Tübingen and Basel 1974, pp. 56–91.

But Kampffmeyer could not muster the necessary bureaucratic and financial support, pitted as he was against powerful opponents over the reform of the Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen. With the rise of National Socialism, Kampffmeyer made yet another appeal for resources to support an expanded program of documentation, research, and survey writing on the Middle East. Such a program would serve Germany's growing interests in the region, and counter the 'mischief' of Jewish commentators on the Middle East and the 'rude arrogance' of the French.[20] Kampffmeyer's use of these arguments was probably instrumental, for he had no known agenda other than the meticulous documentation of contemporary developments. The Nazis ultimately did mobilize the Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen for state purposes, but the thorough study of contemporary history did not figure in their more practical priorities, and the idea died with Kampffmeyer in 1936. German scholarship on the contemporary Middle East lacked the moving spirit, the firm institutional grounding, and the official backing which had been necessary for the launching of large-scale enterprises of collective scholarship in other European capitals.

The Second World War accelerated the processes of decolonization and independence in the Middle East, making Paris the center of another major initiative. The war had dealt a sharp blow to the standing of France in the Middle East, and the Free French under General De Gaulle sought a systematic understanding of the changes wrought by the war in the region. To fill the gap in knowledge, the Free French turned to Évariste Lévi-Provençal. A professor at the University of Algiers before the war, Lévi-Provençal had devoted his scholarly career to the study of Muslim Spain and Morocco. The Orientalist scholar was wrenched from his pursuits when he lost his chair following the implementation of racial laws by the Vichy regime. Lévi-Provençal then joined the Free French in 1942, setting aside his historical research to interpret contemporary Middle Eastern affairs. In December 1943, in liberated Algiers, the Free French decreed the establishment of the Institut d'études de l'Orient contemporain and entrusted its development to Lévi-Provençal. Its purpose was 'to proceed, by direct observation and by acquisition of printed documentation, to the scientific study of the problems posed by the political, social, economic, and cultural evolution of the peoples of the Orient (Muslim Asia and Africa).'

20 For details on the initiative, see Georg Kampffmeyer, 'Über die Grundlagen für den Aufbau einer zusammenfassenden Berichterstattung über die Gegenwartsverhältnisse des Orients,' *Die Welt des Islams*, o.s., 18 (1936): 12–53.

Following the Liberation, Lévi-Provençal came to Paris, and in April 1945 he was appointed to a professorship created for him at the Sorbonne. The Institut d'études de l'Orient contemporain moved to Paris that same year, and set up shop in a hotel suite; Lévi-Provençal lived in one of the back rooms. That year, the new institute published the first issue of the *Cahiers de l'Orient contemporain*.[21]

In launching this new initiative, Lévi-Provençal noted the great French contribution to the development of Orientalist scholarship. 'All the same, one might observe that too often, in this highly meritorious labor, the present is sacrificed to the past. For several decades, other European countries have had official bodies charged with the mission of exploring the modern Orient, while France still lacks a scientific institution expressly devoted to guiding and coordinating the efforts of all those who, under various auspices, are interested in aspects of Islam today.'[22] Lévi-Provençal, too, had the Istituto per l'Oriente in mind, and drew his inspiration from *Oriente Moderno*. His new journal claimed to be 'exclusively documentary, conceived and compiled according to a strictly objective plan,' and its sponsoring institute disclaimed any political bias. As with *Oriente Moderno*, the *Cahiers* defined the Orient as the Middle East, and its structure also resembled that of the Italian journal. Each issue included an overview of the period under review, documents in translation, and a 'synthèse chronologique' on Great Power involvement, inter-Arab relations and political developments in each surveyed country — all based on a systematic reading of the indigenous press. This synthesis constituted the core of the journal, and its high editorial standards matched those of *Oriente Moderno*.

Lévi-Provençal was a scholar of profoundly liberal spirit, who envisioned the new institute as a source of information for promotion of greater French understanding of the new Middle East of independent states. One of the declared purposes of his institute was 'to promote, on scientific grounds, cooperation and mutual understanding between French and Oriental elites.' Once in Paris, Lévi-Provençal became a critic of attempts to reestablish France's damaged standing in Muslim lands by force; he was later an active member of the Comité France-Maghreb, alongside many other leading French Orientalists. French readers could find a surfeit of evidence for Middle Eastern outrage against French policy in North Africa on the pages of the *Cahiers de l'Orient contemporain*.

The *Cahiers* covered 26 years of the contemporary Middle East. It drew

21 Emilio García Gómez, 'E. Lévi-Provençal,' *Al-Andalus* 21 (1956): xi–xvi.

22 'L'Institut d'études de l'Orient contemporain,' *Cahiers de l'Orient contemporain* 1 (1945): 1.

strength from the presence in Paris of eminent institutions of Islamic studies, which provided a succession of leader-scholars and the battery of researchers who plumbed the Middle Eastern press. But the combination of state support and scholarly resources began to come apart in the mid 1960s, and the *Cahiers* finally fell casualty to the turmoil that swept the Sorbonne in 1968. The last issue of the *Cahiers* appeared in 1969. The Centre d'études de l'Orient contemporain still exists as an appendage of the University of Paris III, and it collects newspapers, but nothing has succeeded the *Cahiers* as a French survey of the contemporary Middle East.

Each of the great press-based projects — *Oriente Moderno*, the *Survey of International Affairs*, and the *Cahiers de l'Orient contemporain* — eventually collapsed because they could no longer sustain the commitment of the official and scholarly communities in their respective countries. By their nature, they were expensive initiatives that involved the acquisition of large quantities of material, the reworking of that material by highly skilled teams, and rapid publication of the results. The withdrawal of Europe from the Middle East undoubtedly made it more difficult to justify these projects in terms of national interest.

But another cause for the decline of the great press-based projects was a revolution in the dissemination of information from authentic Middle Eastern sources. The European powers had used radio transmissions in Middle Eastern languages as means of propaganda during the war; after the war, the airwaves of the Middle East were dominated by the radio transmitters of newly-independent Middle Eastern states. The British began the systematic monitoring of these transmissions; the Americans were soon to follow, launching an extensive program for the monitoring, translation, and publication of information carried by the Middle Eastern electronic media. The British and Americans also published the transcripts of these transmissions on a daily basis, eliminating the need for extensive press summarization as the necessary foundation for the writing of contemporary surveys. Projects with a strong core element of press summary, like *Oriente Moderno* and the *Cahiers de l'Orient contemporain*, were gradually overwhelmed by this information revolution. For a time, the monitoring bulletins of the British Broadcasting Corporation enjoyed preeminence, but they could not keep pace with the American appetite for information. The daily report on broadcasts from the Middle East prepared by the Washington-based Foreign Broadcast Information Service and the parallel translations from the press published by the Joint Publications Research Service

represented an organization of time and talents on a scale that only the government of a wealthy world power could finance and manage.

These publications, which gradually revolutionized the way academics researched contemporary events in the Middle East, were not produced under academic auspices. No academic institution could meet the demanding needs of governments, which now required information not on a quarterly or monthly basis, but from day to day and hour to hour. But while no scholarly enterprise could satisfy this kind of urgency, scholars did aspire to give order to this mass of information. From comprehensive and systematic documentation, the academic emphasis shifted to comprehensive and systematic interpretation.

The first strides perhaps should have been made in the universities of the United States, the seats of the fastest-growing interest in the contemporary Middle East. But nothing emerged in the United States to succeed the great contemporary surveys that had flourished in Europe. The style of American academic expertise created many obstacles to such a project. The ethos of individualism in American academia, reinforced by requirements of promotion, channeled the American study of contemporary affairs into books and journals. Other obstacles might best be described as structural, and included the geographic dispersal of Middle Eastern studies in many centers, the inability of any one center to mobilize sufficient resources and expertise to cover the Middle East as a whole, and the distance of leading academic centers from the fulcrum of political power. The individualism and geographic decentralization of American Middle Eastern studies drove American universities to vie with one another in the recruitment of the best European scholars. But the European approach of collective scholarship failed to take root in the expanses of America.

This was not the case in the new state of Israel, where prevailing conditions made for a successful graft of this branch of the European tradition of scholarship. Israel not only inherited the most exacting philological methods, imported by Jewish émigré scholars from Central Europe. Israel also encouraged the study of the contemporary Middle East, which occupied a high rung on the ladder of national priorities. And this study tended to be concentrated in a few select institutions. In 1959, the Israel Oriental Society in Jerusalem gained official support for the establishment of the Reuven Shiloah Research Center. The Shiloah Center began, much like its European predecessors, as an independent research institution operating under academic auspices with official support. The research council of the new center included noted academics and analysts, who rapidly assembled a research staff for the

production of a new annual publication entitled the *Middle East Record*. The first volume, covering 1960, appeared in 1962.

An avowed positivism underlined the *Middle East Record*. The preface to the first volume declared that 'the student of Middle East politics has at his disposal a wealth of analysis, comment and judgement, but singularly little sober fact is readily available by which to check them.' This made it difficult for the historian or analyst to proceed to interpretative studies. The *Middle East Record* proposed to establish the irreducible core of facts from which all other work could proceed: 'The aim of this work is to present the facts in full detail and from the widest possible variety of sources. Where the facts are disputed — and that happens frequently enough in the Middle East — all available versions are quoted, precedence being given to official statements. When it is a matter of underlying motives and causes, or the significance and consequences of events, both official statements and unofficial comment are treated as facts to be recorded.'[23]

The *Middle East Record* therefore shunned explicit interpretation, preferring a straightforward and dry narrative of events. But an undiscriminating taste in 'facts' was the great merit of the *Middle East Record*: nearly everything brought up in the research net was deemed suitable for presentation, and the *Middle East Record* immediately became a formidable source of information, both useful and arcane. The contributors drew upon radio monitoring reports and a collection of Middle Eastern newspapers so exhaustive in its scope that it was and remains unrivalled in the world. The research staff, competent in the relevant languages, scoured the newspapers and established a disciplined regimen for the processing of their data into a highly organized final product. The *Middle East Record* covered the Middle East's relations with the wider world, the relations between countries of the region, and the internal political affairs and international relations of the individual countries. The table of contents of the first volume filled 15 pages.

With its hundreds upon hundreds of pages comprised of two solemn columns of small print, the *Middle East Record* constituted an achievement that could not be matched — and one that the Shiloah Center itself could not sustain. For the retrievable 'facts' of politics were simply too numerous. The gap between the year of record and the year of publication widened with the second volume — an unmistakable sign that the concept of the project exceeded its resource base. Nor was the Shiloah Center in a position to appreciably expand that base. Its product

23 *Middle East Record* 1 (1960): vii.

was the first of its kind addressed primarily to an audience outside the country where it was produced, and the *Middle East Record* did not win the Shiloah Center the consistent bureaucratic support within Israel that it needed to survive as a self-standing institution. The Shiloah Center was saved through incorporation in Tel Aviv University in 1966, but it did not have the resources to sustain the overly ambitious plan of the *Middle East Record*. All told, the *Middle East Record* covered six years of the decade between 1960 and 1970; the last volume, published in 1977, lagged seven years behind the events it surveyed.

The *Middle East Contemporary Survey* represented an answer to the difficulties posed by production of the *Middle East Record*. But the newly conceived annual survey was not a scaled-down version of the *Middle East Record*. It rested upon a different approach to writing on contemporary affairs. Contributors were no longer charged with harvesting masses of 'facts' for a narrative. Instead they were to produce analytical essays incorporating only that factual material deemed significant to the individual contributor's own interpretation of events. *MECS* declared itself an 'annual record and analysis of political, economic, military, and international developments in the Middle East,' implicitly confessing the obvious truth that even the selection of 'sober fact' rested upon analytic judgment. As a record, *MECS* incorporated a large amount of factual material, drawn from the widest array of press sources and radio monitoring reports. But contributors, for the most part historians of the Middle East, were expected to place this material not only in chronological and thematic order, but in analytical frameworks of their own choice. The first volume, covering 1976–77, appeared in 1978, and the volumes have since appeared regularly.

It would be presumptuous for this author to pass judgment here on whether the *MECS* is as comprehensive, systematic, objective, and timely as it strives to be. The burden of appraisal must rest upon the readers of the current and past volumes of *MECS*, who regularly test not only its usefulness as a store of information, but the validity and coherence of its analytical premises. Like its predecessors, *MECS* has been guided by an implicit vision of the contemporary Middle East. The point of departure of *MECS* has been the diminished hold of ideology over political communities, and what the poet and literary critic Kamal Abu Deeb has called 'the cancerous growth of the state' over the past decade. Politics in *MECS* is rarely what it was in Toynbee's *Survey*, a striving on the part of peoples and states for the realization of sublime ideals of independence, freedom and unity. Politics in *MECS* is the struggle for power within states, the struggle for hegemony or survival among states, and the struggle by those who

don't have states to get them. The dominant players are regimes and opposition movements, the former enjoying a greater advantage with each passing year as they build mechanisms of control that have hardened most of them against coups and domestic rebellion. These states are fiercely jealous of their own freedom and security, and resist all attempts to limit their sovereign power made by constituencies and opposition groups at home, by rival states, and by the Great Powers. At its best, political analysis in *MECS* is the tightly reasoned calculation of how players identify and pursue self-interest with greater or lesser scruple, through the calibrated use of persuasion, threat, and force.

MECS is presently the sole heir of a tradition that once flourished in Europe, a tradition of collective scholarship devoted to surveying the contemporary affairs of the Middle East. The enterprise once engaged the talents of scholars at the very center of their disciplines, among them Massignon, Nallino, Toynbee, and Lévi-Provençal. Past surveys not only served and informed the societies that sustained them, but left a valuable record of the twentieth-century Middle East as it appeared to contemporary scholars. The needs of survey writing also created some of the most comprehensive collections of press from and about the Middle East. Like the translation of texts or the collation of manuscripts, survey writing often meant submission to grinding routine and foregoing professional reward. But through the act, scholars generally offered an independent alternative to the highly interested political interpretations of their contemporaries, even when they drew official subsidies for their work. It was the liberal, not the imperial spirit that infused the surveys. Usually incorruptible, the surveys tended to undermine comfortable consensus and conventional wisdom by presenting the Middle East in all its unsettling complexity.

MECS is a continuation of this work, in a particular form determined by circumstances of time and place. The tradition it represents — the scrupulous accounting of deeds and misdeeds, of the choices made by states, leaders, and peoples even as they make them — has special significance in a field that has become politicized and polarized. The surveyors, professed agnostics in the endless debate over the possibility of true representation, continue to set the record as straight as humanly possible — to put down, in the advice of the Ottoman historian and court chronicler Naima, 'what it was men thought and what it was they believed,' and 'whatever they have ascertained to be the fact.'[24]

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24 Quoted by L. V. Thomas, *A Study of Naima*, New York 1972, p. 113.